

U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/663,696
Amendment filed April 11, 2006
Reply to OA dated January 17, 2006

REMARKS

Claims 1, 4 - 8, 10 and 11 - 13 are currently pending in this patent application, claims 1, 11 and 12 now being independent claims. Claims 2, 3 and 9 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer.

Claims 1, 8 and 10 - 12 have been amended in order to more particularly point out, and distinctly claim the subject matter to which the applicants regard as their invention. The applicants respectfully submit that no new matter has been added. It is believed that this Amendment is fully responsive to the Office Action dated January 17, 2006.

At the outset, the applicants thank the Examiner for now indicating that claims 9 - 13 would be allowable if rewritten in the manner suggested in item 7, page 6 of the outstanding Action.

However, in the outstanding Action, claims 1 - 13 are provisionally rejected under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting as being unpatentable over claims 1 - 12 of co-pending U.S. Application Serial No. 10/663,697.

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Furthermore, as to the merits of this case, the outstanding Action rejects claims 1 and 5 - 7 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Sako (U.S. Patent No. 6,278,677). Also, claims 2 - 4 and 8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) based on Sako in view of Inoue (U.S. Patent No. 6,665,255).

The applicants respectfully request reconsideration of these rejections.

In response to the above-noted outstanding rejections, the applicants, in order to help expedite the processing of this application to issuance, have incorporated the allowable subject matter of claim 9 (and the intervening claim 2) into independent claim 1. Claims 2 and 9 have been canceled, while claims 8 and 10 have been amended to have the dependencies thereof from independent claim 1.

Accordingly, independent claim 1, and claims 4 - 8 and 10 which depend therefrom should now all be allowed because the rejections thereof are now moot.

Furthermore, allowable claim 11 (now an independent claim) has been amended in order to include therein the subject matters of claims 1 and 2 from which claim 11 originally depended. Accordingly, claim 11, now in independent form, should remain allowed.

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Moreover, allowable claim 12 (now an independent claim) has been amended in order to include therein the subject matters of claims 1 and 3 from which claim 12 originally depended. Accordingly, claim 12, now in independent form, and claim 13 (which depends therefrom) should also remain allowed.

In view of the above, the withdrawal of the outstanding provisional rejection under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting based on claims 1 - 12 of co-pending U.S. Application Serial No. 10/663,697, the outstanding anticipation rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) based on Sako (U.S. Patent No. 6,278,677), and the outstanding obviousness rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) based on Sako in view of Inoue (U.S. Patent No. 6,665,255) is in order, and is therefore respectfully solicited.

In view of the aforementioned amendments and accompanying remarks, claims, as amended, are in condition for allowance, which action, at an early date, is requested.

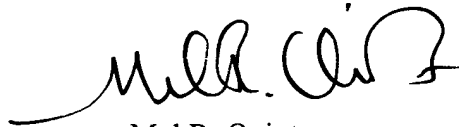
If, for any reason, it is felt that this application is not now in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the applicants' undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below to arrange for an interview to expedite the disposition of this case.

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In the event that this paper is not timely filed, the applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. Please charge any fees for such an extension of time and any other fees which may be due with respect to this paper, to Deposit Account No. 01-2340.

Respectfully submitted,

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